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Letters of Members of the Continental Congress. Edited by EDMUND C. BURNETT. Volume I., August 29, 1774, to July 4, 1776. (Washington, D. C.: Carnegie Institution of Washington. 1921. Pp. lxvi, 572. Paper, \$5.00; cloth, \$5.50.)

WHEN the undertaking of which this is the first volume is complete, we shall have in most convenient form full facilities for a study of the work of the Continental Congress. As the editor modestly says of the collection, it makes on the whole "a quite notable contribution to the knowledge of the proceedings of Congress", though there is no such "transforming body of information as will tend to upset established conceptions of the Revolution", or Congress's part in it. Nevertheless, the editing, which ranks with the best that American scholarship has done, affords the student immense resources for reference and cross-reference never before available. Every canon of good editing has been scrupulously followed, and so admirable is the preface which describes the process that no better text could be furnished to a student of editorial method. One great object of the editor in assembling and choosing the letters to be published has been to supplement the meagre record of the journal, to bring together "into one place whatever information touching the proceedings of Congress may have come down from those who took part in them". Dr. Burnett explains that only those letters, or parts thereof, are included "which add something to the record of Congress beyond what is set down in the Journals". Mere expressions of opinion unless spoken on the floor of the House, or showing the member's stand on a measure, have been excluded. All notes of debates have been brought into this collection except such as John Adams's notes which had been published in the appendixes of the Ford edition of the *Journals of the Continental Congress*.

In addition, all fragmentary journals of proceedings, members' diaries, official letters, and private letters, which contribute facts of value have been included. In general, the editor has admitted only such letters as were written from the seat of Congress during a member's attendance there. A few exceptions are Galloway's reminiscent comments on the work of the first Congress, and the correspondence of Jefferson, McKean, and John Adams in their declining years relative to the Declaration of Independence.

From all these we may here glean new fragments of the story of what happened in that momentous assembly wherein there were no stenographers, no reporters, and wherein men were rarely proud enough of what they had said to have committed it to paper. A disappointing thing, as Dr. Burnett comments, is that "a large proportion of these letters come from the hands of a comparatively small number of members". Many members left behind no contribution to these pages.

Although there was an injunction of secrecy binding the members

not to reveal the proceedings of their conclave, there were many excuses for ignoring the order, of which an important one was the inclination of delegates to look upon themselves as ambassadors bound to reveal in confidence to the governors of their sovereign states all matters of consequence to them. Moreover, there was the natural human desire to confide to a wife or friend a dread secret which, of course, must go no further.

Regarding the collecting of the materials for this and the forthcoming volumes, the editor says that all historical and biographical publications wherein delegates' letters or papers might occur have been searched. Matter suited to these volumes was found more largely in print in the period before December, 1776, than thereafter. Beyond that date the editor was forced to rely much more on manuscript sources which he found in the archives of Washington, particularly the Library of Congress, and in the capitals of the original thirteen states, as well as in private and historical society collections of that section. There is a most useful survey in the preface of all the repositories from which these manuscripts were drawn. In fact it comes near being a complete summary of the repositories of archive material on the American Revolution. The new materials embraced in this first volume are letters of James Duane and Oliver Wolcott, and scattered letters from the Schuyler, Trumbull, and Bancroft papers.

The editor devotes several pages of his preface to a useful summary of the impressions made and the principal revelations of the letters in the present volume. Members of the early Congresses begin by writing of the great unanimity of the members, but soon they speak of it not as existing but as something to be attained if they are not to fail. The idea of independence growing at first slowly, then swiftly, and finally silencing all opposition is graphically shown here. The sectional motives that determined Washington's selection as commander-in-chief are clearly shown, and the insistence of each jealous province upon its proper proportion of high officers in the army. No right-minded reviewer can have any self-respect if he fails to offer some criticism, and the one blot on so perfect a scutcheon I find in Dr. Burnett's citation of Patrick Henry's assertion that he was no longer a Virginian but an American as proof that some were lifted "to a plane of idealism above sectional predilections and prejudices". When Henry said that he was only urging that Virginia be given more votes than the smaller states! The reviewer, though he has read several hundreds of the letters and checked up the editing at numerous points has found little to say in the review that is not said in the long and excellent preface, which in this case is not an obituary.

C. H. VAN TYNE.